



PROJECT MUSE®

The Leap of the Beast: The Dramatic Style of Henry James's
"The Beast in the Jungle"

David Smit

The Henry James Review, Volume 4, Number 3, Spring 1983, pp. 219-230
(Article)



Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/hjr.2010.0114>

➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/364676/summary>

The Leap of the Beast: The Dramatic Style of Henry James's "The Beast in the Jungle"

by David Smit, University of Iowa

What determined the speech that startled him in the course of their encounter scarcely matters, being probably but some words spoken by himself quite without intention—spoke as they lingered and slowly moved together after their renewal of acquaintance.—Henry James, "The Beast in the Jungle"

Only a few words into the story and we know where we are, at least in general—we are in Henry James country, the jungle. In another sense, of course, we are nowhere at all. We do not know who "he" is or who "they" are or what "the speech that startled him" is or why the speech should have startled him at all. A few steps more and we are already in the thick of it, wading through syntax that surges fitfully forward, over and around the interjections and appositions, hacking through dense qualifications and abstract nominals, swatting at pronouns that buzz about, hovering, always seeming to be but never quite there. We resist an initial impulse to just give up, to return to easier terrain, because deep inside we believe that attacking the wilderness is good for us, and because maybe, just maybe, winded and overwrought, we'll experience that rush of sense and feeling that comes with a prolonged effort, when the words take over and for a glorious period we're somewhere else, inside the words or behind them, wherever words take us.

Still, the way seems more difficult than usual. After all, we have found ourselves following, fascinated, John Marcher and May Bartram as they discuss a rare and strange event that is going to happen in Marcher's future. The event is not specified, and the more Marcher and May talk, the more we realize that neither of them knows what the significant event is. All we learn is that May promises to help Marcher watch and wait for the great event to happen, whatever it is. The prospect of watching two people wait for a nameless

event does not seem to hold out much of a reward for all of the effort we have made up until now. And yet, paradoxically, as we continue to wait with the couple we realize a sense of progress. When May says that she knows the great secret, that in fact it has already happened but that she will not tell Marcher what it is, we intuitively sense our goal. And when the final rush comes—for me it was the beginning of the sixth and last section of the story—even as we are being carried away, we know we have been guided, cared for, that the jungle has been artfully arranged. As we hurtle forward, we catch glimpses of the things that have been there all along, making our progress, if not easy, then "dramatic" at least. The final revelation is the ultimate conclusion to the paradox: a present metaphor dramatizes a past event that didn't happen, and our hero's suffering at the end is the strange and rare experience that he has already missed.

James himself, in his preface, called the life of John Marcher in "The Beast in the Jungle" "a great negative adventure" (BJ x)—this from a writer who worshiped the idea of "the dramatic." Now, it is precisely the idea of "the dramatic" that is a difficult problem in James. When critics call James's method dramatic, most often they are referring to the manner of his overall presentation, his arrangement of picture and scene.¹ And in the prefaces to the New York Edition of his works, James does indeed provide evidence for this interpretation. In the preface to What Maisie Knew, for example, he has this to say about "scene": "The treatment by 'scene' regularly, quite rhythmically recurs; the intervals between, the massing of the elements to a different effect and by a quite other law, remain, in this fashion, all preparative, just as the scenic occasions in themselves become, at a given moment, illustrative . . ." (AN 157-58, italics mine). James is here commenting on the way he arranges scenes in a novel or story. The intervals between

the scenes, he says, produce a certain rhythm to the occurrence of the scenes, and this rhythm itself may produce certain effects. Although James does not say so outright, certainly part of the preparation for each scene is the creation of expectation, a sense of suspense, which the scenes themselves fulfill or satisfy.

More recent criticism has called attention to the way James uses syntax to create a pattern of suspense and expectation. First R. W. Short, then Seymour Chatman, and later Michael Peinovich and Richard Pattenon have noted the use of delayed referents and buried subjects in James's late style (Short 81; Chatman 56-59; Peinovich and Pattenon 83-84). For example, James often begins both individual paragraphs and entire novels with pronouns, leaving the reader in suspense as to just what or whom he is talking about. A good illustration is the opening of "The Beast in the Jungle" that I have already cited. Jane Tompkins calls attention to the way James inserts parenthetical material at key moments in the sentence structure of "The Beast," thereby delaying our understanding of what he is talking about and creating suspense. One of her best examples is the sentence "Then it was, just at the turn, as he afterwards made it out to himself, that, everything else failing, she herself decided to take up the case and, as it were, save the situation" (BJ 67). Tompkins argues that the delaying phrases—"just at the time," "as he afterwards made it out to himself," and "everything else failing"—introduce a tension in the reader, who has to suspend his search for the end of the sentence while trying to comprehend the interruptions, thereby intensifying "the force of the outcome"; that is, the reader's final comprehension of the sentence. This intensified effort on the part of the reader, Tompkins maintains, is analogous to Marcher's tense search for the significant event in his life. Chatman finds a "heavy sense of portent" in "The Beast" and attributes it to James's ellipsis, the reduction and deletion of a great deal of syntax (100-105). Chatman quotes a passage and notes where ellipsis leaves us with a sense of not knowing all we should: "So, while they grew older together,

she did watch with him, and so she let this association give shape and colour to her own existence. Beneath her forms as well detachment had learned to sit and behavior had become for her, in the social sense, a false account of herself" (100-101). Chatman points out that "watch" can, of course, be intransitive, but that a prepositional object is implied: what was May watching for? Chatman also notes that "this association" is much more suggestive than "her association"—it implies not only May's association with Marcher but with the entire matter of watching and waiting. In addition, the words "this association" imply a mental connection, the relating of things together, a connection in which one of the terms is missing, the connection between Marcher and—what? Chatman calls these ellipses "a syntactic absence which calls attention to a psychological presence" (100). All of these critics argue, persuasively I think, that James's style, despite its vagueness, in fact because of its vagueness, does create a sense of expectation in the reader that we can call dramatic.²

What all of these critics overlook, or do not emphasize sufficiently, is the way in which this sense of expectation is satisfied stylistically throughout the story. James does provide for emotional climax and a sense of closure at regular intervals in "The Beast," almost always at the end of sections with a short declarative sentence and almost always at the end of sentences with a forceful image or metaphor. Each of the six sections of the story contains a number of sentences that announce or point to significant events to come. These sentences are not examples of Chatman's vagueness and uncertainty. They in effect "telegraph" what the section will be about and provide a set of expectations for the reader. These expectations are at least partially fulfilled at the end of the section with a fragment of dialogue or a pithy periodic sentence. The individual sentences of the story resolve suspense by being almost entirely periodic, at least semantically and rhetorically, if not grammatically. Although a sentence may fade away with a subordinate clause, the final clause usually specifies the preceding thought more con-

cretely, often metaphorically, providing the reader with a sense of progress and resolution. Thus, what James claimed to do for the overall structure of his stories, "the massing of elements to a different effect," he also did for the sections and the sentences of "The Beast in the Jungle." The different effects of climax and closure allow James to convey a sense of drama, a sense of expectation met and suspense resolved, even as he is doing what he is famous for: circling around an abstract subject, mulling it over, qualifying it, building what William James called "this gigantic envelopment of suggestive atmosphere."³

I

The six sections of "The Beast in the Jungle" are marked off by roman numerals. Each section has one scene, a fixed locale in which particular actions occur. In section I John Marcher meets May Bartram at a party. She causes him to remember that he has met her before and that during their first meeting he revealed his great secret to her, his belief that he has been marked for a great and rare destiny. Marcher still has no idea what that destiny is; nevertheless, section I ends with May agreeing to help Marcher watch and wait for his great end. In the second section quite some time has passed, and May reveals that she has finally determined what Marcher's secret is. She knows, but she will not tell Marcher what it is. In section III, Marcher wrestles with the implications of what May has told him. Then he learns that she has contracted a serious disease and he sees that she is aging greatly, but he can still only think of "resolving" his secret, no matter what the cost. In section IV, May announces that Marcher's terrible secret, what was to have made him significant, has already happened, but Marcher still cannot determine what it is. In section V, May dies and Marcher feels that he has just missed discovering what it was that May knew. In section VI, Marcher, fresh from a trip around the world, visits May's grave and finally realizes what he was destined for—to be so preoccupied with himself as to miss his one great chance at love, love for May.

Each of these sections of the story is made up of conversations between Marcher and May (until May dies), summaries of Marcher's feelings and attitudes, and the portrayal of Marcher's thought, his confusion and misunderstanding, his inability to grasp what is happening to him. A man muddling about is not very dramatic, and the scenes with dialogue are extremely elliptical: Marcher and May always talk around the subject, never about it directly. But these scenes with dialogue, despite their abstractness, are arranged to create dramatic effects and to heighten the dramatic irony: that May knows—and eventually we as readers know—what Marcher does not. The major scenes in sections I, II, and IV are each foreshadowed by sentences that provide expectations for the reader. Each builds, through May's insight and Marcher's confusion, to a climactic fragment of dialogue that satisfies these expectations. Section I begins with what Chatman characterizes as a typical Jamesian sentence, the elliptical and suggestive sentence I quoted at the beginning. But this sentence is not deliberately vague and uncertain; it announces what the first section will provide: the name of the person who was startled, what the speech was that startled him, who he encountered, how they were acquainted before, and why the speech should have startled him so. By the time of the dialogue that ends the first section, we have found out that it was Marcher who was startled and May who startled him. We have learned that they had previously met on vacation in Italy some time before. What the final dialogue provides is the speech itself that startles Marcher and an explanation of why the speech is so startling: Marcher had told May his secret, his belief in his rare destiny, but he has forgotten that he did so. During the final dialogue, Marcher and May use the language of fear and awe to describe Marcher's secret. The apprehension of his destiny "haunts" Marcher. "Are you afraid?" May asks. Marcher doesn't know if he is or not. But he asks May to accompany him as he waits for his destiny. The scene ends: "They had been moving by this time across the room, and at the door, before passing out, they paused as for the full wind-up of their

understanding. 'I'll watch with you,' said May Bartram" (BJ 74). This last short piece of dialogue provides a sense of climax and finality to the entire scene even as it foreshadows what the rest of the story will be about.

James uses the same technique two more times in the opening section, each time to introduce a new paragraph. The first paragraph of the story ends this way: "It [Marcher's straying about] had an issue promptly enough in a direction that was not to have been calculated" (BJ 62). The issue "not to have been calculated" is, of course, Marcher's sudden meeting with May Bartram, and she is introduced in the very next sentence, which begins the second paragraph. Later, James once again introduces a subject without an apparent antecedent: "What she [May] brought out, at any rate, quite cleared the air and supplied the link—the link it was so odd he [Marcher] should frivolously have managed to lose" (BJ 67-68). Here, the link that Marcher has so frivolously lost is provided by May: she remembers where she and Marcher have met before; he has forgotten that they had met at all. This information is also immediately provided in the next paragraph. Thus, James uses "telegraphic" sentences both to foreshadow the events of entire scenes and simply to announce the content of the succeeding paragraph.

The second section proceeds the same way. Early in the section, after a summary of how Marcher and May have settled into a long friendship, James announces a change in Marcher's thinking. Marcher has just been pondering that May might need a life of her own and that he ought not to consider himself her sole source of attention. Then James makes his announcement: "Something fairly remarkable came to pass with him, for that matter, in this connexion—something represented by a certain passage of his consciousness, in the suddenest way, from one extreme to the other" (BJ 77). The remarkable change in Marcher's consciousness announced in this sentence is another example of how James proclaims a theme ahead of time. In this case, however, the

precise nature of Marcher's shift in consciousness is ambiguous: the section proceeds to describe three changes in Marcher, and we as readers are left to determine which of the three fits the requirements of remarkableness and suddenness. In the next paragraph, James describes how Marcher decides to become selfish "just a little" in order to protect his secret. Marcher's decision to become selfish may be the remarkable passage of consciousness that comes suddenly, but it doesn't seem very remarkable in the context of Marcher's long absorption with his own destiny, and there is no indication in the paragraph that Marcher's decision is particularly sudden. Later, Marcher feels that May is watching and evaluating him carefully, and this fact causes him to judge the world as "stupid" for not seeing him as May does, as he thinks he really is, and he comes to appreciate May even more. But this "passage of consciousness" is not sudden either, although it may be remarkable for its faulty logic. Thus, when the dialogue arrives at the end of the section, we are still expecting to see a sudden and remarkable shift in Marcher's consciousness. This dialogue is introduced with yet another "telegraphic sentence": "What we are especially concerned with is the turn it [May's remarks] happened to take from her one afternoon when he had come to see her in honour of her birthday" (BJ 83). The turn that May's comments happen to take is that she provides Marcher with the shock for the change in his consciousness that we have been expecting. At the end of the scene, she announces that, regarding Marcher's rare destiny, "You'll never find out" (BJ 89). And once again a short climactic phrase caps our expectation of what the story has explicitly stated as its subject. The irony of the situation is that despite this shocking knowledge and the passage of Marcher's consciousness "from one extreme to the other," in another sense he does not change at all. In section III, he acts as if nothing has happened, as if the fact that he will never discover his fate is just another hopeless cipher.

In section IV, James continues the method. He opens with a sentence that summarizes Marcher's doubts about his

ability to discover his destiny after May's shocking announcement: "Then it was that, one afternoon, while the spring of the year was young and new she met all in her own way his frankest betrayal of these alarms" (BJ 98). May meets Marcher's "betrayal of these alarms" by announcing at the end of the section that what was to have made Marcher significant has already happened: ". . . he showed once more his mystification. 'What then has happened?' She was once more, with her companion's help, on her feet, and, feeling withdrawal imposed on him, he had blankly found his hat and gloves and had reached the door. Yet he waited for her answer. 'What was to,' she said" (BJ 107). Thus, the three key sections of the story follow the same pattern: an introduction with "telegraphic sentences" that set up specific expectations for the reader, and a dialogue that satisfies these expectations and ends with a short climactic phrase. These dramatic endings are the cause for further confusion and introspection by Marcher in the next section.

The scenes in sections III and V are not arranged climactically—in fact, section V is definitely anti-climactic—but each provides Marcher with further incentive to keep muddling through, believing in his destiny, and to prolong the dramatic irony: after section II, May knows Marcher's fate and we readers have a good idea, but Marcher is completely in the dark.

May's understanding Marcher is another way in which James highlights Marcher's ignorance. It is May who progressively reveals the nature of Marcher's secret; it is May who suffers from lack of love and gradually withers away, unfulfilled except as Marcher's friend. Marcher cannot understand the cause of her suffering and realizes only vaguely that it has something to do with him. This is a further irony. The conventional dramatic interest of the story is in a supporting character. May provides the function of a lead character—she suffers and changes—and it is May who comes to new knowledge. Marcher's character is dramatized by what it is not in comparison with May. This irony reaches grotesque proportions in section V, the anti-climactic

scene, and the very anti-climax reinforces the irony. May tells Marcher not to suffer; she advises him to try to avoid looking for what he has missed—the knowledge would be too much—and Marcher feels that he has just missed some sense of what she really means. In the next paragraph, which is Marcher's reflection on this conversation, May dies, and the fact of her passing is barely noted. May's death causes Marcher no suffering, no drama; it is just another piece of information for him to sort through as he tries to make sense of his own life: "Strange beyond saying were the ways of existence, baffling for him the anomaly of his lack, as he felt it to be, of producible claim. A woman might have been, as it were, everything to him, and it might yet present him in no connexion that any one seemed held to recognize. If this was the case in these closing weeks it was the case more sharply on the occasion of the last offices rendered, in the great grey London cemetery, to what had been mortal, to what had been precious, in his friend" (BJ 114–15). This deliberately anti-dramatic style forcefully points out Marcher's ignorance and lack of feeling. May's death does not affect his thinking, does not change the relentless probing and qualification of the style. To Marcher it doesn't really matter if May is dead or alive.

Despite the fact that sections III and V are not arranged climactically, they do end with periodic sentences that provide a sense of closure. In section III, May makes Marcher go on, even though he cannot understand his dilemma. The section ends, "He had but one desire left—that he shouldn't have been sold" (BJ 97). At the end of section V, May has died, and Marcher, feeling that he has just missed understanding what she knew, visits her tomb, kneels down, and tries to penetrate what the inscription on the tombstone, May's name and dates, now means to him. The section ends, "He gave them a long last look, but no palest light broke" (BJ 118).

II

So much critical attention has been paid to the so-called "typical" sentence of

James's late period with its ambiguous references, its constant parenthetical interruptions, its awkwardly placed adverbials, that it is often quite forgotten that James was capable of writing simple direct sentences such as those that end each section of "The Beast in the Jungle." R. W. Short characterizes the "typical" Jamesian sentence as "loose," with an average of 35.3 words and "surprisingly few subordinate constructions." The complexity of the sentence, Short maintains, comes not from a complex idea but from the complex relationship between ideas, each of which has "its own finite grammatical structure" connected by "loose" conjunctions (73). But I believe that Short fails to distinguish between the grammatical structure and the rhetorical force of a sentence. The typical periodic sentence is composed of an independent clause preceded by subordination. The main point, often in forceful subject-verb-object form, is contained in the main clause and comes at the end; it in effect builds to a kind of climax. Granted, "The Beast" does not often contain this sort of sentence. But although James's sentences may be grammatically "loose," they are rhetorically periodic: they ignore grammatical boundaries such as the semi-colon and the simple conjunction, and they build to a climax by placing vivid, forceful images and metaphors that clarify the main clause at the end. This subordination of ideas at the expense of grammatical cues and of the vividness and forcefulness of the images is used to most dramatic effect in the presentation of Marcher's thought. James presents one of Marcher's thoughts in the main clause, then proceeds to specify it more concretely, often metaphorically, in the supposedly coordinate but really subordinate second clause. This technique has the effect of arousing an expectation in the main clause—what is Marcher really after?—and then partially satisfying that expectation in the second clause—Ah! what he means is that! Or what he means is analogous to that! In addition, each clarification in the second clause gives Marcher a basis for continued thought and gives James the opportunity to present a mind at work, slowly inching forward toward truth, a model of consciousness itself. Early in the

process, we as readers detect the implied theme of the process, what it is that Marcher wants to resolve, and this sets up a further expectation, how Marcher will resolve the difficulty, so that we can watch the entire process as a whole satisfy our expectations. I do not think that James was trying to imitate "the look and behavior of thought" by using this method of presentation, as Percy Lubbock asserts (157-8). Indeed, I even doubt that the method meets William Veeder's requirements for consciousness in action, the ability of a thought to be open-ended and self-generating (209-227, *passim*). The style is too consciously unified and arranged to be anything more than the illusion of open-endedness and self-generation. Rather, I believe James's method is a "model" of thought, a highly abstract metaphor that captures only very generally something of the way the mind works, just enough to show an evolving awareness, the way a mind elaborates on certain ideas and images, and still does it in an artistically dramatic way.

Two good examples of James's use of rhetorically periodic sentences are the first and last paragraphs of section VI in "The Beast." To show the subordination of the ideas despite the coordinate structure of the sentences and to show how the paragraphs switch modes, how they change from traditional narrative to the presentation of thought and back again, I have diagrammed them by assigning each a numerical level. Traditional narrative sentences will be level 1. The presentation of Marcher's thought will be level 2. Coordinate ideas will be at the same level; subordinate ideas, more specific elaboration on ideas already presented, will be at lower levels 3, 4, 5.⁴ Since the paragraphs depend so heavily on coordinate structure separated by semi-colons, I have treated each side of the semicolon as a separate independent clause, even though, in some cases, what follows the semicolon is a long subordinate or relative clause. This scheme clearly illustrates how the movement of Marcher's thought is dramatized by rhetorically periodic sentences that satisfy expectations with specification and figurative language.

Let us begin with the first paragraph of section VI. The first sentence contains three clauses: two narrative clauses that tell what Marcher has been doing since May's death, followed by one clause that begins his ruminations on his travels:

Sentence

- 1) 1. He stayed away, after this, for a year;
1. he visited the depths of Asia, spending himself on scenes of romantic interest, of superlative sanctity;
2. but what was present to him everywhere was that for a man who had known what he had known the world was vulgar and vain.
- 2) 2. The state of mind in which he had lived for so many years shone out to him, in reflexion, as a light that coloured and refined, a light beside which the glory of the East was garish cheap and thin. (BJ 119)

In the second level of the first sentence, the grammatical subject—"what was present to him everywhere"—is made more specific at the end of the sentence: "the world was vulgar and vain." The second sentence has a grammatical subject—"the state of mind"—that parallels the subject of the preceding clause—"what was present to him everywhere." What Marcher thinks and feels parallels what he sees. This parallelism results in a repetition of his first insight, but the first insight has been subtly expanded. The metaphor compares Marcher's state of mind over the years with a light; it makes his mental state concrete. But the fact of the light, his state of mind before the trip, his state of mind with May when he was looking forward to his destiny, is more important than "what was present to him everywhere." Beside the light of his past state of mind, "the glow of the East was garish cheap and thin." Marcher's thought, then, has progressed; it has not only become more specific and concrete but it has added nuances through repetition. The luridness of the East, a repetition of

the idea that the world is vulgar, is a judgment that illustrates how Marcher's former state of mind justified his life and how all his travels since have produced only a sense of vanity and cheapness. This progression has been carried grammatically by the parallelism at the end of the sentences.

Sentences three and four elaborate why Marcher feels that his travels have been in vain:

Sentence

- 3) 2. The terrible truth was that he had lost—with everything else—a distinction as well;
3. the things he saw couldn't help being common when he had become common to look at them.
- 4) 3. He was simply now one of them himself—
4. he was in the dust, without a peg for the sense of difference;
2. and there were hours when, before the temples of gods and the sepulchres of kings, his spirit turned for nobleness of association to the barely discriminated slab in the London suburb. (BJ 119)

Sentence three states the truth that Marcher's more refined state of mind has produced: he has lost a distinction. Then that point is brought home more specifically at the end of the sentence: "the things he saw couldn't help being common when he had become common to look at them." Sentence four repeats this insight and makes it more concrete with a metaphor: "he was in the dust, without a peg for the sense of difference." The fourth sentence then returns to level 2 in order to continue the thought about Marcher's distinction, to conclude that his sense of distinction can only be achieved by association with "the barely discriminated slab in the London suburb." The third and fourth sentences have made Marcher's feeling and thought increasingly concrete and explicit and then leaped to the solution that has already been hinted at by his former state of mind: it is

only May's grave, all that is left of his former state, that can provide him with the distinction he craves.

Sentences five and six present three ways in which May's tombstone has become important to Marcher; they are subordinate to the idea of May's tomb in sentence four:

Sentence

- 5) 3. That had become for him, and more intensely with time and distance, his one witness of a past glory.
- 6) 3. It was all that was left to him for proof or pride,
- 3. yet the past glories of the Pharaohs were nothing to him as he thought of it. (BJ 119)

Although each of the three clauses here has a weak verb, a form of "be" or "become," each refines the idea of the distinction that May's grave provides Marcher: it is a witness of a past glory, it is all that is left "for proof or pride," and it makes the glories of the Pharaohs seem like nothing.

After a return to narration—Marcher goes back to visit May's grave—the passage proceeds in the same fashion:

Sentence

- 7) 1. Small wonder then that he came back to it on the morrow of his return.
- 8) 2. He was drawn there this time as irresistibly as the other, yet with a confidence, almost, that was doubtless the effect of the many months that had elapsed.
- 9) 2. He had lived, in spite of himself, into his change of feeling, and in wandering over the earth had wandered, as might be said, from the circumference to the center of his desert. (BJ 119-20)

Sentence seven is straight narration. Sentence eight is not semantically periodic,

and its function is ambiguous. It might even be considered coordinate with sentence seven or a transition to a renewal of Marcher's thought. But beginning with sentence nine, the sentences are again periodic. The ninth sentence makes Marcher's change of feeling more concrete with a metaphor at the end: "he had wandered, as might be said, from the circumference to the center of his desert."

Sentence

- 10) 2. He had settled to his safety and accepted perforce his extinction;
- 3. figuring to himself, with some colour, in the likeness of certain little old men he remembered to have seen, of whom, all meagre and wizened as they might look, it was related that they had in their time fought twenty duels or been loved by ten princesses.
- 11) 2. They indeed had been wondrous for others while he was but wondrous for himself;
- 2. which, however, was exactly the cause of his haste to renew the wonder by getting back, as he might put it, into his own presence. (BJ 120)

Sentence ten repeats the idea of Marcher's living into his change of feeling—he "settled to his safety and accepted perforce his extinction." Then it makes the idea more concrete with a metaphor whose point is revealed at the very end of the sentence—the old men, past their prime, had "in their time fought twenty duels or been loved by ten princesses." The eleventh sentence picks up the moral of the metaphor and drives it home at the end of the clause—"he was but wondrous to himself"—and then it summarizes and circles back to the idea of Marcher's return to May's grave, but with a difference. Now Marcher thinks of the grave as part of himself, and this insight is dramatically stated at the end of the clause: he wants to get back "into his own presence."

Sentence

- 12) 1. That had quickened his steps and checked his delay.
- 13) 2. If his visit was prompt it was because he had been separated so long from the part of himself that alone he now valued. (BJ 120)

After a brief return to narrative in sentence twelve, sentence thirteen repeats the idea of sentence eleven—that May's grave is Marcher's own presence—but with additional information: now this presence alone is what Marcher values.

In general, then, James's coordinate sentences often shift from one mode to another and from one conceptual level to another after the semicolon: the balanced structures are not really balanced conceptually. Ideas are repeated, but always with increasing specificity or concreteness, always with additional nuances or insights, however slight. And these specific or concrete images, these refinements of ideas that satisfy our expectations are almost invariably at the end of clauses.

Notice also that the conclusion to all of Marcher's thought—his decision to return to May's grave because it was "the part of himself that alone he now valued"—is only a slight advance from his original idea that his travels were vain and cheap in contrast to his state of mind with May. The introduction of the theme of Marcher's thinking, his sense of being vulgar, raised our expectations of what Marcher would do about his feelings. That overall expectation has been met as we have watched Marcher come to the decision to return to May's grave, but the distance we have covered to reach that decision, through minute patterns of repetition and refinement, has not been very great at all. That we have come such a short way but with such great interest is a triumph of James's dramatic method, his use of concrete images and metaphors at the end of clauses to satisfy the expectations raised earlier.

The final paragraph of the story confirms the method we have seen at work

in the first paragraph of section VI. Marcher's thought proceeds in two steps, from the revelation that he should have loved May (in sentences one to six) to the realization that his present suffering is what he has been missing up until now (in sentences seven to twelve).

Sentence

- 1) 2. The escape would have been to love her;
2. then, then, he would have lived.
- 2) 3. She had lived—who could say now with what passion?—since she had loved him for himself;
3. whereas he had never thought of her (ah how it hugely glared at him!) but in the chill of his egotism and the light of her use.
- 3) 2. Her spoken words came back to him—
2. the chain stretched and stretched.
- 4) 2. The Beast had lurked indeed,
2. and the Beast, at its hour, had sprung;
3. it had sprung in that twilight of the cold April when, pale, ill, wasted, but all beautiful, and perhaps even then recoverable, she had risen from her chair to stand before him and let him imaginably guess.
- 5) 3. It had sprung as he didn't guess; it had sprung as she hopelessly turned from him, and the mark, by the time he left her, had fallen where it was to fall.
- 6) 2. He had justified his fear and achieved his fate;
2. he had failed, with the last exactitude, of all he was to

fail of;

1. and a moan now rose to his lips as he remembered she had prayed he mightn't know. (BJ 126)

The first sentence announces the theme: that Marcher's destiny was his failure to love May. Sentence two contrasts May's loving life with Marcher's self-absorption, and the contrast is made concrete at the end of the sentence with "the chill of his egotism and the light of her use." The third sentence continues Marcher's thought with a recollection of May's words and dramatizes his remembering with another metaphor, the "chain stretched and stretched." Sentence four introduces the metaphor of the lurking beast, and the next three clauses (the rest of four and all of five) describe how the beast had sprung, a good example of the way James ignores syntactic boundaries to achieve his effects. The sixth sentence summarizes the paradox, how the leap of the beast was Marcher's failure to take advantage of the opportunity to love that May offered him. The first section of the final paragraph, then, proceeds to elaborate on the theme of Marcher's destiny, first by contrasting Marcher and May, then by making Marcher's lost opportunity concrete with the metaphor of the leaping beast, and finally by summarizing Marcher's failure. Each step but the last is made forceful, fulfilling our expectations in short steps, by a short declarative sentence or a longer periodic sentence ending with a specific image or metaphor.

The concluding section of the paragraph leads to the ultimate paradox: the leap of the beast in the past produces a similar leap in the present, and Marcher's great destiny—that he was never to love, that he was never even to feel—is fulfilled in suffering.

Sentence

- 7) 2. This horror of waking—this was knowledge, knowledge under the breath of which the very tears in his eyes seemed to freeze.
- 8) 1. Through them, none the less, he

tried to fix it and hold it;

1. he kept it there before him so that he might feel the pain.
- 9) 2. That at least, belated and bitter, had something of the taste of life.
- 10) 1. But the bitterness suddenly sickened him,
2. and it was as if, horribly, he saw, in the truth, in the cruelty of his image, what had been appointed and done.
3. He saw the Jungle of his life and saw the lurking Beast;
3. then, while he looked, perceived it, as by a stir of the air, rise, huge and hideous, for the leap that was to settle him.
- 12) 1. His eyes darkened—
1. it was close;
1. and, instinctively turning, in his hallucination, to avoid it, he flung himself, face down, on the tomb. (BJ 126-67)

Marcher sees the beast that has reappeared, sees it in all his bitterness and horror, and throws himself down on May's tomb. To achieve this dramatic ending, the ultimate resolution to all our expectations, James relies almost exclusively on short simple forceful clauses and grammatically periodic sentences. Only sentence seven is not a sentence of this kind. In all of the others, the predicates at the end of the clause describe concretely what Marcher sees or feels: he tries to fix and hold the image of the beast, he tries to feel the pain, the bitterness sickens him, he sees the truth, his eyes darken, and he flings himself on the tomb. James strips this syntax to the bare bones of the method he has used all along; his parenthetical interruptions are only a few words long, and they are equally forceful and vivid: "belated and bitter," "horribly," "in the cruelty of his image," "as by a stir of the air," "huge and hideous." Our expectation of how Marcher would deal with the knowledge of his great secret, that his destiny was his failure to love, his

failure even to feel, is met with a vengeance.

The jungle of James's later prose style is not quite as dense and forbidding as some critics would like to make it.⁵ I have gone through "The Beast in the Jungle" looking expressly for an unredeemed monstrosity, a sentence so abstract, so convoluted, so inherently ambiguous as to be impenetrable; I couldn't find one. This is not to deny the many difficulties that James's style presents to sheer comprehension, to say nothing of interpretation. George Dillon is especially good at pointing them out.⁶ But in general, James's prose is flexible and varied, it is to-the-point, and even more importantly, it flows, despite the famous parenthetical expressions, toward resolution and climax in the concrete and the metaphoric. James lets us know what he is about, he arouses our expectations, and he forcefully develops his subject toward a climax: he satisfies these expectations. James's jungle may be difficult, but it is not chaotic and it is not dull. It is as dramatic as the leap of a beast in our mind's eye.

Notes

¹See, for example, Joseph Wiesenfarth.

²Although Chatman prefers the word "lively": "Only in the extreme cases, when the mental operations are actually personified, become characters, do we seem to get a genuine sense of 'drama'" (83). I am not sure what Chatman means here—how can a mental process be personified? Chatman gives no examples.

³William James in a letter to Henry in 1907, commenting on Henry's "third manner of execution" after reading The American Scene, quoted in Matthiessen 341.

⁴Students of writing theory and paragraph development will recognize this as a variation of a system first proposed by Francis Christensen. Christensen has a great deal of difficulty distinguishing between levels of generality, between coordination and subordination. I do not

pretend to have clarified the difficulty here, but in the two Jamesian paragraphs under consideration, a subordinate idea is clearly one that provides an example for a previous idea. See sentences three and four, p. 226 above: level 3, Marcher's thinking that all around him is common because he is common, is an example of his loss of distinction, the idea in level 2.

⁵In addition to Chatman (2) and Short, assumed throughout, see Vernon Lee and Dillon.

⁶Dillon's study of the difficulties in five writers is arranged according to various problems in comprehension, so his examples of the problems in James are scattered throughout.

Key to Works by Henry James

- AN—The Art of the Novel. Ed. R. P. Blackmur. New York: Scribner's, 1934.
 BJ—"The Beast in the Jungle" and Preface in The Altar of the Dead and Other Tales. New York: Scribner's, 1922.

Other Works Cited

- Chatman, Seymour. The Later Style of Henry James. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972.
 Christensen, Francis. Notes Toward a New Rhetoric. New York: Harper and Row, 1967.
 Dillon, George. Language Processing and the Reading of Literature. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1978.
 Lee, Vernon. The Handling of Words. New York: Dodd, Mead, 1923.
 Lubbock, Percy. The Craft of Fiction. New York: Viking, 1957.
 Matthiessen, F. O. The James Family. New York: Knopf, 1947.
 Peinovich, Michael and Richard Patteson. "The Cognitive Beast in the Syntactic Jungle: A Study of James's Language." Language and Style, 11(1978):82-93.
 Short, R. W. "The Sentence Structure of Henry James." American Literature 18(1946):71-88.
 Tompkins, Jane. "'The Beast in the Jungle':

- An Analysis of James's Late Style." Modern Fiction Studies, 16(1970):185-91.
- Veeder, William. Henry James—The Lessons of the Master. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975.
- Wiesenfarth, Joseph. Henry James and the Dramatic Analogy. New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1963.